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Surrey to have a Mayor?

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Surrey will get a mayor despite months of uncertainty and a lack of solid confirmation from the government, the county council leader has insisted. Tim Oliver said he is “confident” a mayor of Surrey would go ahead, even though the central government has yet to formally sign off and has delayed mayoral elections in other parts of the country.

“I can assure you, it will happen,” Cllr Oliver said, speaking to the local democracy reporting service (LDRS), on December 17. Surrey was placed on the government’s first wave of local government reorganisation specifically to unlock devolution and create a mayor. The leader added that ministers were fully aware of the county’s position.

The delay, he suggested, was more about shifting national priorities and new ministers rather than any change of heart over Surrey itself. “It’s slightly frustrating,” he said. “We didn’t get a confirmation date of the mayoral election when we thought we would.”

Since reorganisation was announced last year, there has been a change of secretary of state and a rethink over how quickly devolution should roll out. Mayoral elections have already been pushed back to 2028, something Cllr Oliver believes Surrey is now being caught up in. “They haven’t said no,” he said. “But equally they didn’t say yes at the same time as the announcement, which is what we had expected.”

The county leader said he has already met with the minister responsible and is due to have another meeting in early January, saying discussions with the government were “active”. Despite the uncertainty surrounding a mayor, Cllr Oliver said Surrey’s positioning has remained strong and that the county would likely follow whatever timetable the government agrees with other mayoral areas: potentially bringing elections forward to 2027 rather than waiting until 2028.

While residents may find the process confusing, he said the end goal was clearer leadership and more powers devolved from Westminster. The LDRS reported in October there was “no promise” that Surrey could have a directly-elected mayor as part of the government’s devolution despite this being described locally by councillors as the entire main purpose of reorganisation.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has previously said that the references to

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Surrey getting a directly elected mayor were “not quite accurate” as the decision “has not been confirmed” and that they were only “committed to working with partners to establish a strategic authority for the area”.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Council Leader Tim Oliver speaking at full council meeting October 8. (Credit: Surrey County Council live stream)

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